

“METATHETIC PARALLELISM” — AN UNRECOGNIZED SUBTYPE OF SYNONYMOUS PARALLELISM

By

NORMAN M. BRONZNICK

Rutgers — The State University of New Jersey

IT IS WELL KNOWN that in biblical poetry it is not necessary for each word element of a synonymous parallelism to occupy the identical syntactic position in each corresponding stich. When it does not—and this is of frequent occurrence—it is known as chiasmic parallelism. Using for the sake of simplicity a 2:2 meter, synonymous parallelism may appear either as $ab//a'b'$ or, chiasmically, as $ab//b'a'$.

What has gone unrecognized, however, is that an object or a predicate that logically or grammatically or formulaically belongs to one stich may be interchanged at times with that of the corresponding stich resulting, chiasmically, in a strangely striking synonymous parallelism. Using again a 2:2 meter, chiasmic parallelism may be either of the type of $ab//b'a'$ or, metathetically, of the $ab//a'b$ type (or, in its varied form, $ab//ba'$).

To differentiate between these two types, I propose to name the second type “metathetic parallelism” because the corresponding objects or predicates are transposed; or “proleptic parallelism” because, in this arrangement, the content of the second stich is already anticipated in the first stich. However, before entering into an extended analysis of the nature of this parallelistic type, its etiology and teleology, we must first proceed to demonstrate its existence. This will be done by a close examination of the verses which follow.¹

1. The following abbreviations for the English versions will be used: AB = *The Anchor Bible*; JB = *The Jerusalem Bible*; JPS = *The Jewish Publication Society*; KJV = *King James Version*; NAB = *The New American Bible*; NEB = *The New English Bible*; RSV = *The Revised Standard Version*.

1. Isa 17:5

והיה כאסף קציר קמה וזרעו שבלים יקצור

“When the reaper gathers the standing grain, and his arm harvests the ears (RSV).” The verse, as it reads, suffers from a factual inaccuracy. One cannot gather the standing grain before it is reaped (cf. Deut 23:26). Young (1965, *ad loc.*), taking *qāṣîr* to mean “harvest,” translates: And it shall be like the gathering of the harvest, even the standing corn, and his arm will harvest the ears. While resolving the problem I raised, he creates in the process new problems. The noun *qāmâ* is made to dangle syntactically, and the pronoun “his” in the second stich has no subject to which to refer.

The New JPS renders the verse: After being like the standing grain, harvested by the reaper, who reaps ears by the armful. But it glosses over the problem by using the inconclusive English verb “to harvest,” which may mean “to gather” as well as “to reap,” to render the Hebrew verb *’ēsōp* (“to gather”).

Taking the objects “standing grain” and “ears” as metathetic parallels, the verse reads neatly: It shall be like a reaper who gathers the ears, and his arms reap the standing grain . . .

2. Isa 22:3

כל קציניך נדדו יחד מקשת אסרו כל נמצאִיך אסרו יחדו מרחוק ברחו

All translators, beginning with the LXX, have wrestled hard with this verse. As it reads, there is a glaring self-contradiction. How can all the leaders flee and at the same time be bound up, and how can all those who remain be bound up and at the same time run off far away?

Some translators, trying to overcome the difficulty, impose the meaning “they huddled” on the verb *’ussārû*, rendering the verse as follows: Your commanders are all in flight, huddled together out of bowshot, and all your stoutest warriors (emending, on the basis of the LXX, *nimṣâ’ayîk* to *’am-mîṣayîk*) are huddled together, they have taken to their heels (NEB). Aside from the unwarranted imposition of the unattested meaning “to huddle” on the verb *’sr*, this interpretation is hardly acceptable because it weakens the effect of the dreadfulness of the calamity that Isaiah intends to depict.

Other translators resolve the discrepancy in the second stich by introducing the conjunction “though” that is not present in the text: All of you who were found were captured, though they had fled far away (RSV), leaving the discrepancy in the first stich for the exegetes to resolve. Other translators, however, follow the lead of the LXX and transpose the phrases *miqqešet ’ussārû* and *mērāḥôq bārāḥû*, resulting in a meaningful statement: All your

leaders fled far away together, fled far off; all who were in you were captured together, captured without the use of the bow (NAB; similarly, the New JPS).

The last interpretation seems to be the only valid one as dictated by simple logic. However, the text need not be emended. It can stand as is when viewed as a metathesized parallelism.

3. Isa 29:3

יצרתי עליך מצב והקימתי עליך מצרות

Closely following the Hebrew, as done by RSV, this verse reads in translation: And I will besiege you with towers, and I will raise siegeworks against you. Ehrlich (1969, *ad loc.*) already realized that, for better articulation, logic demands for the objects to be reversed. When reversed, the verse reads aptly as follows: And I will besiege you with siegeworks, and I will raise towers against you.

However, while Ehrlich intuitively sensed that the metathesization of the objects “appeared to the prophet to be elegant and beautiful,” he drew the wrong conclusion from this correct assumption: “Because Isaiah is not wont to use such devices, it seems to me that this prophecy, from the beginning of the section to verse 8, was not uttered by Isaiah. There is corroboration for this in the name Ariel given to Jerusalem, a term mentioned nowhere in the entire book” (trans. from the Hebrew).

Evidently Ehrlich was unaware that the use of this poetic device is present in Isa 17:5; 22:3; 34:9 as well as elsewhere in the Bible. He is, therefore, unjustified in considering this device to be a latecomer to biblical poetry, let alone using this as a criterion for the dating of biblical texts.

4. Isa 29:5

והיה כאבק דק המון זריך וכמץ עבר המון עריצים

To use *zārāyik* (“your strangers”) with the pronominal suffix “your” is hardly admissible in this context. The pronominal suffix cannot have possessive meaning since these strangers are complete outsiders and do not, in any wise or manner, belong to you, nor can it refer to action exercised against you since strangeness is not something that lends itself to being acted out against someone.

In Targ. J. the word is rendered “your scatterers,” with which Yellin (1939, *ad loc.*) agrees. This interpretation finds direct corroboration in the verse: And I will dispatch to Babylon *zārīm* and they will winnow her (Jer 51:2). Radaq *ad loc.* takes *zārīm* to denote “winnowers”—a denotation adopted in several English translations (RSV, NAB, JB)—explaining its

grammatical form as being a substantive adjective on the pattern of *dāvīm* ("aching men"). This explanation makes it unnecessary to assume, as commonly suggested, that the targumic *Vorlage* was *zôrāyik*.

While accordingly this distich reads well enough, it will gain in aptness by being construed as a metathesized parallelism. In view of the fact that *ry* is the root of the technical verb for winnowing, by which act the help of the wind is enlisted to rid the grain from its chaff, the verse will fare far better when construed metathetically: And the multitude of your winnowers (i.e., those who scatter you) will be like passing chaff, and the multitude of the tyrants like fine dust.

In addition, it is worth adding that the reconstructed second stich thus gains in vividness. Whatever the etymon of the biblical verb *rš* might have been, this polysemous verb has come to have as one of its meanings "to destroy" or "to crush" (cf. Isa 2:19; 10:33). Hence this stich may read now: "and the multitude of your destroyers will become like fine dust." By prophesying that the winnowers will turn into chaff and the destroyers will be crushed into fine dust, the prophet is making use of the standard prophetic principle of retribution in kind, measure for measure. Inner harmony, in form and thought, is thus restored to the entire verse.

5. Isa 49:25

גם שבי גבור יקח ומלקוח עריץ ימלט

While in verse 24 the objects *malqôah* ("booty") and *šəḇî* ("human captives") are properly matched with their respective verbs, it is puzzling to find the selfsame objects inaptly transposed in verse 25: Indeed, the captives of the warrior will be taken, and the booty of the tyrant will be saved (or, will save itself). The verb *yimmālēt* hardly applies to booty even if it be in the form of livestock.

The puzzling arrangement is easily resolved by interpreting the verse metathetically as taken in an alternate version in Targ. J., where it reads: Indeed, the booty of the warrior will be taken, and the captives of the tyrant will save themselves. This solution commends itself for an additional reason. In verse 24 "booty" is associated with "the warrior," whereas in verse 25 it is associated with "the tyrant," leaving "the captives" to be associated with "the warrior." Taking verse 25 metathetically, brings it in complete realignment with verse 24.

6. Isa 54:14

רחקי מעשק כי לא תיראי וממחתה כי לא תקרב אליך

As the verse reads: You shall be far from oppression, for you shall not fear;

and from terror, for it will not approach you (RSV), it contains a glaring mismatching of statement and reason. To resolve this baffling difficulty, the New JPS takes *məḥittā* to mean “ruin” and renders the verse as follows: You will be safe from oppression, and shall have no fear; from ruin, and it shall not come near you. But this version does violence to the conjunction *kî* by rendering it freely as “and.”

Again, there is no need to deviate from the Hebrew text since what we apparently have here is a case of metathetic parallelism. Applying this device, the following sensible reconstruction is obtained: You shall be far from oppression, for it will not approach you; and from terror, for you shall not fear.

7. Isa 55:5

הוּ גוֹי לֹא תָדַע תִּקְרָא וְגוֹי לֹא יָדְעוֹךָ אֵלֶיךָ יִרְוּצוּ

Except for minor stylistic variations, this verse is generally rendered essentially as follows: Behold, you shall call a nation that you do not know, and nations that do not know you shall run to you. As it stands, the verse is completely illogical. For it is hardly reasonable to call a nation that one does not know, or to expect nations that do not know one to come running to him. In fact, we find the more logical version elsewhere: A people I know not will serve me (Ps 18:14).

Grappling with this problem, the New JPS renders the first stich: So you shall summon a nation you did not know. By placing the lack of knowledge in the past, it makes the summoning of such a nation possible. But this version misrepresents the imperfect *lō tēda'* by translating it as a perfect.

There is, however, no need to deviate from the Hebrew. Construed metathetically, the verse emerges as a well-articulated, harmonious distich: You will call a nation that does not know you, and nations that you do not know will run to you.

8. Amos 6:11

וְהִכָּה הַבַּיִת הַגָּדוֹל רִסְסִים וְהַבַּיִת הַקָּטָן בְּקַעִים

Sematically, the lexical meaning of *rāsîsîm* is “tiny bits,” whereas that of *bəqî'im* is “large splinters.” Such being the case, would it not be more reasonable, realistically as well as stylistically, for the prophet to prophesy that the big house will be smashed into large splinters, and the small house into tiny bits? The rabbis, apparently aware of this mismatch, resolve it exegetically. Identifying the large house with the kingdom of the Ten Tribes, the rabbis explain the prophecy that it will be smashed into tiny bits to imply that it will never recover, as was the case. Whereas regarding the small house, represent-

ing the kingdom of Judah, it is prophesied that it will be smashed into large splinters to indicate that it will ultimately be reconstituted, as it indeed came to pass following the return from the short exile in Babylon. (Lev. R. 19:4 ed. Margulies, p. 425, and see note 4, and especially Lieberman's note thereto, p. 875).

There is no gainsaying that, from the prophetic perspective, this is unquestionably a valid interpretation. Viewed, however, from a literary-stylistic perspective, this verse is better taken metathetically, and construed as: He will smash the big house into large splinters and the small house into tiny bits.

9. Amos 8:12

ונעו מים עד ים ומצפון ועד מורח

According to Ibn Ezra, followed by many other commentators, what is meant by the phrase "from sea to sea" is "from the Red Sea to the Mediterranean Sea," i.e., from South to West. All the four directions are thus included in the verse. There still remains, however, the obvious question that, when dealing with movement from one direction to another, the four directions are generally arranged meristically, i.e., from East to West and from North to South.

Applying, however, to this verse the poetic device of metathetic parallelism, the desired arrangement will emerge. This verse is to be construed accordingly as: And they will wander from the Mediterranean Sea (i.e., West) to the East, and from North to the Red Sea (i.e., South).

10. Ps 25:14

סוד ה' ליראיו ובריתו להודיעם

What is problematic in this verse is the sense of the second stich. It is unusual for the object "covenant" to be governed by the verb "to make known." This object is governed by verbs stemming from the following roots: *krt* (Gen 21:27); *qwm* (Gen 17:7); *md* (Ps 105:10); *ntn* (Gen 17:2); *kr* (Ps 111:5). The verse, He told you his covenant (Deut 4:13) is a unique exception because there "covenant" is used as a metonym for the Torah, which is subject to being revealed. However, in the verse under consideration, covenant is apparently used in its ordinary sense. Hence to be governed by the verb "to reveal" does not seem to be appropriate.

In its apparent attempt to address this objection, the JB translates the verse as follows: The close secret of God belongs to them who fear him, his covenant also, to bring them knowledge. But the proposed cure is indeed far worse than

the original malady because the parallelistic balance as well as the meter are thus utterly destroyed.

Everything, however, will fall neatly in place upon taking this distich as a metathetic parallelism. It is to be understood as : God's covenant is for those who fear him, and he makes known to them his secret. The second stich is thus making use of a well-attested expression (Amos 3:7; Prov 11:13; 20:19). As for the use of the preposition *lā-* with the making of a treaty, it is proper when the treaty is wholly for the benefit of only one party (cf. Koehler-Baumgartner, 1958, p. 151), which are, in this case, those who fear God.

11. Ps 35:7

כי חנם טמנו לי שחת רשתם חנם חפרו לנפשי

It is self-evident that the phrases “they hid a pit” and “they dug their net” are inadmissible. The Masoretes, attempting to alleviate this incongruity, treat the nouns *šāḥat* and *rištām* as being in the construct state, with the verse thus reading: For without cause they hid for me their netted pit, without cause they dug for me. The second stich is, apparently, to be taken elliptically, with the object “pit” to be supplied.

Modern commentators, however, solve the awkwardness of the phraseology by emendation, transposing the objects “pit” and “net.” This emendation is adopted by the RS V and others. Applying, however, the device of metathetic parallelism, the desired result is achieved without the need of outright emendation.

12. Ps 50:19

פִּיךָ שֶׁלַחַת בִּרְעָה וּלְשׁוֹנְךָ תִּצְמִיד מִרְמָה

This verse has two apparent difficulties. One, the verb *šālaḥṭā* (“you let loose”) is more appropriate to the tongue than to the mouth, because it is the tongue that can be extended, and it is, as it were, imprisoned in the mouth until it is set loose (cf. Ps 73:9). Two, the second stich has generally been rendered in two ways, neither of which is satisfactory. Rendering it, “your tongue frames deceit” (KJV; JPS) poses the problem of attestation, as the verb *tašmîd* is nowhere used with this sense. Rendering it as “you harness your tongue to deceit” (NAB; NEB), though staying close to the attested meaning of the verb, results in the unattested expression of “harnessing the tongue.”

The verb *šmd*, which has the meaning “to couple” and, by extension, “to clutch,” may be applied to speech pronounced by the lips that operate together. The semantic nexus between “joining tightly” and “speaking” is attested in

the analogous root *'mš* that is used for both, as shown by Yalon (1971, pp. 351–355). This is also attested in the use of the phrase *məḥazzəqîm dibrê tôra 'al pîhem* (*Seder Eliyahu R.*, ed. Friedmann, p. 107), which, contextually, seems to mean those who speak words of Torah with their mouth. Accordingly, the verse under discussion, metathetically construed, reads felicitously as: You let loose your tongue to speak evil, and your mouth (i.e., your lips) clutches deceit. This brings it in line with the fact that, formulaically, evil speech is generally associated with the tongue while deceitful speech with the mouth (i.e., lips), as, for example, Guard your tongue from evil, and your lips from speaking deceit (Ps 34:14). Slander is generally attributed to the tongue (e.g., Ps 15:3), from which the denominative verb “to slander” is derived (Ps 101:5; Prov 30:10). Hence the metathesization of the parallel nouns, in the verse under discussion, serves more than one desideratum.

13. Mic 2:1

הוי חושבי און ופועלי רע על משכבותם

Melamed (1961, p. 134) correctly noted that the phrase “workers of evil” is anomalous since, formulaically, it appears in the Bible no less than twenty-two times as “workers of iniquity.” Basing himself on the poetic device, which he terms “the breakup of stereotype phrases,” he states: “I am of the opinion that here, too, the prophet took a common stereotype ‘doers of iniquity’ . . . and split it up,” thus yielding the reconstituted distich: “Woe to the doers of iniquity, who devise evil on their beds . . .”

While this reconstruction is correct, it is a misapplication of his hypothesis, according to which a stereotype parallel or collocated pair is often broken up and distributed between two separate stichs. But this is not at all the case in the verse under consideration, where the formulaic objects of the verbs *ḥôšəḇê* and *pô'ālê*, which are *ra'* and *'āwen* respectively, are inverted. Such an occurrence can only be explained by metathetic parallelism, a poetic device of which he was unaware but, intuitively, felt to be operative in this verse.

14. Ps 90:9

כי כל ימינו פנו בעברתך כלינו שנינו כמו הגה

This distich is best construed as a metathesized parallelism, in which *bə'ebrātekā* and *kāmô hege* are interchanged, thus yielding the following: For our days pass away like a breath (or, sound), we spend our years in your wrath. This reconstruction commends itself for the following two reasons.

First, the simile “like a breath” is inappropriate for the phrase “we spend our years.” For this phrase we should expect a simile that denotes manner

rather than duration. Nor will rendering *hege* as "sigh," as some do, resolve the problem. It is apparently for this reason that most translations take liberties with the text. Emending *kāmô* ("like") to *bāmô* ("in"), the second stich is rendered: Our lives are over in a breath (JB). Others mitigate the difficulty by changing the subject of the stich from the person to the years: Our years come to an end like a sigh (RSV; similarly, NEB). But these remedies are merely cosmetic because, as said, unjustified liberties are taken with the text.

Second, construing the distich as being metathesized, will yield the recognizable phrase "we spent our years in your wrath," which has its parallel in the verse "they shall spend their days in prosperity, and their years in pleasure" (Job 36:11, cf. 21:13). Also, this verb, with "days" its subject, appears in a similar phrase "For my days are spent in smoke" (Ps 102:4), and the expression "we spend our years in your wrath" has its counterpart in verse 7 of the psalm under discussion: "for we are spent in your anger." All in all, there is sufficient ground for treating this distich as a metathesized parallelism.

15. Ps 105:18

ענו בכבל רגלו ברזל באה נפשו

In arriving at the proper interpretation of this verse, two problems must be addressed. One, why single out the foot as the object of his torture? Two, how is *napšô* to be understood?

As for the first problem, "his foot" might be taken, by way of synecdoche, to mean the body as a whole, as attested in the Arabic word for man *rajul*. This route was probably taken in arriving at the following translation: They had weighed him down with fetters (NAB). Another possible solution is to take it as an ellipsis to be rendered paraphrastically as: He was kept prisoner with fetters on his feet (NEB). Others render this stich literally: They tortured his feet with fetters (JB), leaving the resolution of its implications to the commentaries.

As for the meaning of *napšô*, it was rendered by the medieval exegetes as "his self," i.e., "his body" (Radaq, *ad loc.* and to Isa 46:2). Modern commentaries render it "his neck," translating the second stich: His neck was put in a collar of iron (RSV). This is evidently based on the attested use of *nepeš* for "throat" (see Koehler-Baumgartner, 1958, p. 626), but there is no basis for extending it to include the neck as well.

Taking, however, this distich as a metathesized parallelism, a simple and elegant solution is achieved. By transposing *raglô* and *napšô*, the verse reads: They tortured (or, afflicted) his soul with fetters, his feet were placed in iron chains. The well-attested phrase "to afflict the soul" (Num 29:7; 30:14; Ps 35:13; Isa 58:3, 10) now makes its appearance in the verse under discussion, making the suggested reconstruction all the more desirable.

16. Prov 18:15

לב נכון יקנה דעת ואזן חכמים תבקש דעת

The verse, An understanding heart acquires knowledge, a listening ear seeks knowledge, is not logically coordinated because, sequentially, seeking knowledge precedes the acquisition of knowledge. This fault can be remedied by regarding the verse as a metathesized parallelism, thus reading: An understanding heart seeks knowledge, a listening ear acquires knowledge. This construction is corroborated by the fact that elsewhere, in Prov 15:14, seeking knowledge is attributed to an understanding heart.

It also makes far better sense to relate the acquisition of knowledge, rather than the seeking of knowledge, to the ear, which is a passive organ, lacking initiative. In fact, the ear is treated as the organ for sifting and absorbing knowledge (Job 12:11, 13:1). The LXX renders "ear" in Job 33:16 as "mind." All this is in accord with the Babylonian view of the ear as the seat of understanding.²

17. Job 13:25

העלה נדף תערוץ ואת קש יבש תרדף

Translating the first stich as "will you fear a driven leaf," though lexically justified, is exegetically untenable. It neither makes for a good parallel with the second stich "and will you pursue dry stubble," nor does it make good sense in itself. Why should Job, who views himself as the helpless underdog, imply, even sarcastically, that he is being persecuted because he is feared by God.

The alternate translation "will you frighten a driven leaf" (RSV) is unacceptable. Since a driven leaf cannot be frightened, it turns the phrase into a mixed metaphor. Furthermore, there is no firm support for taking the verb *ta'ārôš* transitively with the meaning "you will frighten." In Isa 2:19, 21, where it is used transitively, the exact meaning is uncertain. In fact, Targ. J., followed by Rashi and Radaq, render it "to crush," and not "to frighten" as some do. Furthermore, frightening someone is a causative act, which would require the use of the *hip'îl* rather than the *qal*.

This verse, however, is best translated: Will you crush a driven leaf, and will you pursue dry stubble (cf. KJV; Hakhm, 1970, *ad loc.*), but should be

2. For references, see G. Friedrich (1967, vol. 5, p. 546). This will help explain a seemingly inexplicable *halakhic* ruling according to which one who deafens someone for life is liable to payment for total disability (*Baba qama*, 85b). This puzzled the Tosafists and other commentaries *ad loc.* But, in keeping with Semitic anthropology that the ear is the seat of understanding, causing permanent deafness becomes tantamount to depriving someone of his mind which is, understandably, the equivalent of general disablement.

understood metathetically as, Will you crush dry stubble, and will you pursue a driven leaf. Being unaware of metathetic parallelism, David Yellin (1927, *ad loc.*) comes to the same conclusion, but by the method of emendation.

18. Job 30:17

לילה עצמי נקר מעלי וערקי לא ישכבון

While the verse may be taken as an ordinary parallelism, it is better taken as a metathesized parallelism. All translators struggle with the word *mē'ālāy* in the first stich. Some, basing themselves on the LXX, leave the word out as a gloss (NEB); others emend it to a word meaning “sickness,” thus translating the stich “at night-time sickness pierces my bones” (JB); Dhorme (1967, *ad loc.*) joins this word to the preceding word *niqqar*, and emends them to read *niqqārîm* (“are pierced”). The rest render it into one forced English equivalent or another.

Interpreting *ōrəqay*, in the second stich, to mean “my sinews,” as based on the LXX and the use of this root in Arabic and Aramaic, the entire verse will make excellent sense when the parallel nouns “my bones” and “my sinews” are taken metathetically. It is to be construed as follows: At night he picks out my sinews from me, and my bones do not rest. This reconstruction commends itself given the fact that tranquillity, or the lack of it, is generally associated with the bones: There is no peace in my bones (Ps 38:4); All my bones were made to shake (Job 4:14); All my bones shake (Jer 23:9).

19. Job 38:30

כאבן מים יתחבאו לפני תהום יתלכדו

To make sense out of the first stich, the medieval exegetes (e.g., Ibn Ezra, *ad loc.*) interpret the verb “they became concealed” as a laconism to mean that the waters hardened like a stone and thus became invisible. The Targum, rendering the verb by two composite verbs “they congeal and hide,” follows this explanation unless it is taken as a confluence of two alternate versions.

By philological manipulation, some consider this verb as a dialectical form of *yithammāmû*, which, on the basis of the Arabic, is shown to mean “they will harden” (AB, *ad loc.*). There are those who attribute to the verb *yithabbā'û* the unattested meaning “covered” and thus render the stich: When the waters lie covered as though with stone (NAB; similarly, NEB).

Others simply emend the verse by transposing the verbs in both stichs to read: The waters harden like stone, and the face of the deep becomes concealed (cf. Mandelkern, *Concordance*, p. 366 and RSV). This logical resolution is

obtained, without emendation, once the existence of metathetic parallelism is acknowledged.

20. From the 'Amidah Prayer

הטוב כי לא כלו רחמיך והמרחם כי לא תמו חסדיך

Although parallelism, as a standard poetic device, was abandoned in post-biblical poetry, it nevertheless makes occasional appearances in various compositions of the post-biblical period, as shown by Gray (1915, pp. 23–33). The distich above, taken from the thanksgiving benediction of the 'Amidah prayer, is another such example: The beneficent one whose mercies never end, and the merciful one whose favors never cease.

It suffers, however, from a self-evident illogicality. Normally, we would expect the doling out of mercies to be attributed to the merciful one, whereas the dealing out of favors to be ascribed to the beneficent one, instead of the reverse as formulated in this distich. This, again, proves metathetic parallelism to be a legitimate poetic device whereby, in this case, the objects "mercies" and "favors" are to be construed as transposed.

While there are still more verses that are better taken as metathesized parallelisms,³ the ones brought to light thus far should suffice for the purpose of demonstrating the operative character of this poetic device. What needs to be done at this point, however, is to direct attention to analyzing the literary effects of this device as well as to theorizing about its likely etiology.

Metathesis is a common linguistic phenomenon. It is not limited merely to transposition of letters, sounds and syllables of a word, but was also used in rhetoric to include the transposition of words (*The Oxford English Dictionary*). Similarly, this might be the case with metathetic parallelism except that, in this case, a transposition of thought takes place instead of phonetic transposition. A synonymous parallelism created, for example, by the breakup of a stereotype phrase or a fixed pair, represents essentially one unified prosaic statement, as shown extensively by Melamed (1961, pp. 115–153) and as noted by Gray (1915, p. 20) and already anticipated by the rabbis (*barayta* of the thirty-two *middot*, no. 19). Therefore, it may happen that in the heat of the creative process of splitting a unified prosaic statement into two distinct poetic parallel stichs, certain qualifying words that are more appropriate to the subject of one stich might, involuntarily, become interchanged with those in the corresponding stich.

3. E.g., Amos 5:21; Jer 8:15; Ps 56:13, 74:19; Job 6:11, 13:26. Also Ps 23:5 may be taken as a metathesized parallelism which would obviate the proposed emendation by Schwarz (1970, pp. 118–120).

Furthermore, certain corresponding word elements in many synonymous parallelisms are meant to be read in a crisscross manner, as written and as reversed. For example, the distich: To declare your kindness in the morning, and your faithfulness in the night (Ps 92:3) is meant to be read as is and, in addition, as reversed: To declare your faithfulness in the morning, and your kindness in the night. It can also be reduced prosaically to one statement: To declare your faithfulness and kindness at all times.

There are also, however, synonymous parallelisms which, even though they can be reduced to one single prosaic statement, cannot be read in reverse. For example, the distich: His eyes will be red with wine, and his teeth white with milk (Gen 49:12), which, when reduced prosaically, simply means: They will have plenty of wine and milk to drink, cannot have its parallel word elements inverted. The metaphoric expression would be utterly distorted when read reversibly, resulting in the absurd: His eyes shall be white with milk, and his teeth red with wine. Since, however, certain word elements in many synonymous parallelisms are meant to be read crosswise, it may happen, in a nonreversible parallelism, that the poet will out of habit reverse a word element that properly appertains to the corresponding stich.

There is also the possibility that metathetic parallelism is an outgrowth of alternating parallelism. A tetrastich A/B/C/D may have the arrangement in which C is the complement of A, and D the complement of B. Or, for that matter, D may be the complement of A, and C the complement of B. For example: The wicked have drawn the sword, and have bent their bow, to cast down the poor and needy, to slay the upright of way (Ps 37:14). For other examples, see Melamed (1945, p. 184).

By treating (unconsciously at first) each predicate in certain distichs as a stich in its own right, the distich was transformed into a tetrastich. Then, the application of the alternating arrangement (which is syntactically intelligible in the true tetrastich) to this newly-conceived tetrastich gave rise to what became, in effect, metathetic parallelism.

In sum, metathetic parallelism made its debut, in all likelihood, innocently and without deliberation. However, as it gained legitimacy, attaining a gauche but subtle charm all its own, it became an accepted device to be used at will for various purposes. Besides the general need for variation, there seem to be three particular uses for this device.

The first is that by the use of metathetic parallelism the poet is able to arrange for the concluding words in the first stich to be read together with the opening words in the second stich as a unit (e.g., Ps 90:9; Isa 22:3; 29:3,5). By arranging for the proximity of those words, their close relationship is effectively highlighted.

Secondly, Held, in an unpublished dissertation quoted by Boling (1960, p.

223), divided words into two classes — A-words and B-words, and stated: “An A-word is the more common word, used in the first of two parallel clauses; whereas a B-word is usually or even exclusively used in the second of two parallel clauses . . . While A-words are common in prose, B-words are rarely used except in poetic constructions.” As a result, the poet is forced to resort, at times, to the use of metathetic parallelism, when the less common word is more applicable to the subject of the first stich (e.g., Amos 5:21; Jer 8:15; Ps 58:3; 102:21).

Thirdly, metathetic parallelism is used for the purpose of foreshadowing. By using, for example, a predicate in the first stich that properly appertains to the subject in the second stich, the reader will anticipate the content of the second stich while reading the first (e.g., Isa 54:14; Amos 6:11; Job 13:25; 15:33; 30:17; 38:30). When metathetic parallelism is used for this purpose, it may be termed “proleptic” or “anticipatory” parallelism. For it is similar to the rhetorical device known as prolepsis, which is defined as “the use of an epithet in anticipation of its becoming applicable” (*Random House Dictionary*).

Whatever the immediate purpose might be, an overall telling effect results from the use of metathetic parallelism. Often the two synonymous stichs hang together rather loosely, each being a self-contained entity. By metathesizing the parallelism, a tightly-interlocking unity is at once created, turning what would have been two juxtaposed synonymous stichs into an indissolubly wedded pair.

While this applies to all metathesized parallelisms, it is worth illustrating this effect by Job 13:25. The would-be formulation of this verse: Will you pursue a driven leaf, and crush dry stubble, represents a distich of which each stich is strikingly vivid in itself, but the two together form a rather loose pair. However, by formulating the verse metathetically, Will you crush a driven leaf, and pursue dry stubble, a crisscrossing interrelationship between the two stichs is introduced, which causes the two to become inseparably interlocked.

Before concluding this paper, a word needs to be said regarding the frequency of metathetic parallelism in biblical poetry. In view of our limited knowledge regarding biblical formulaic language and in view of our incomplete knowledge as to the precise meanings of many biblical lexemes, we may safely suspect that some synonymous parallelisms that seem to be well taken in the form they appear are, in reality, concealed metathetic parallelisms.

To conclude: whether the evidence brought to light in the preceding lines is sufficiently convincing to prove conclusively the validity of metathetic parallelism, there is enough cogency in it to warrant further investigation. In any case, being a novel hypothesis, more research is needed to refine its conceptualization and define its parameters with greater precision.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Boling, G. 1960. “Synonymous Parallelism in the Psalms.” *Journal of Semitic Studies* 5:221–225.
- Dhorme, E. 1967. *A Commentary on the Book of Job*. Tr. Harold Knight. Leiden.
- Ehrlich, A. B. 1969. *Miqra kipšuto* (reprint, Berlin 1899). New York.
- Friedrich, G. 1967. *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. Tr. G. W. Bromiley. Grand Rapids.
- Gray, G. B. 1915. *The Forms of Hebrew Poetry*. London.
- Ḥakham, A. 1970. *Peruš da'at miqra: 'Iyyoḥ*. Jerusalem.
- Koehler, L. and W. Baumgartner. 1958. *Lexicon in Veteris Testamenti Libros*. Leiden.
- Melamed, E. Z. 1945. “Hendiadys in the Bible” (Heb.). *Tarbiz* 16:173–189.
- . 1961. “Break-up of Stereotype Phrases as an Artistic Device.” *Scripta Hierosolymitana* 8:115–153.
- Schwarz, G. 1970. “Einen Tisch Angesichts Meiner Feinde.” *Vetus Testamentum* 20:118–120.
- Yalon, H. 1971. *Pirqey lašon*. Jerusalem.
- Yellin, D. 1927. *Ḥiqrey miqra: 'Iyyoḥ*. Jerusalem.
- . 1939. *Ḥiqrey miqra: Yaša'yahu*. Jerusalem.
- Young, E. J. 1965. *The Book of Isaiah*. Grand Rapids.